

February 13, 2012

Dear Higher Education Committee Members:

I am writing as a faculty member in the English Department at Southern Connecticut State University to indicate that "seamless transfer" from the community and technical colleges will not meet your aims of getting well trained people into the workforce more quickly. I would have testified in person tomorrow, but I have other inflexible obligations.

First, I would argue that the HB 5030's aim is correct but it doesn't sufficiently understand the real needs of students. Students in the community colleges take their core courses with an open access peer group. The underpreparation of many of these students for college work affects the level of instruction that can occur in a classroom. Even though the learning goals of a curriculum may be the same between a first year composition course at the community colleges and one at one of the CSU universities, the amount of learning may well not be. One of the facts of teaching is that one tries to organize a class to meet the needs of all of the students in that class. Even when a teacher has high expectations for student learning, those expectations are affected by the capacity of students in a given class to meet those goals. Learning will occur at a pace that fosters student competence and success, but that often means slowing the amount of learning to allow some deep learning to occur. Since CSU does not have nearly the same number of students who need remediation in some form, core classes there can occur at a higher level (even a slightly higher level can make a difference). Higher expectations, slightly (or significantly) faster delivery of learning, and a stronger peer group often will produce students who have achieved a higher level of competence, which will better prepare them to utilize skills in their eventual chosen majors. "Seamless transfer" may save students money and time, but if they are not acquiring the core competencies they need to succeed in their majors at CSU, then they are not being helped. And if they arrive with a need for extra help from faculty in their majors, they may decrease the amount of learning that their peers in their majors may get (because they may slow the amount of learning that can occur).

This is not to say that community college students are a problem. I believe in access, and in educating as many people who can benefit from higher education. But I also believe that there is an ethical obligation to ensure that any student be given the necessary educational supports to succeed. That means carefully scaffolded curricula that recognize and meet the educational needs of very specific student cohorts in different parts of the CSU and CC systems. Students at CSU and the CCs are not enormously different, but they are different enough that different classes and learning curricula are necessary to provide excellent outcomes in terms of competency acquisition.

The upshot is that a curriculum that works extremely well within the CSU system may not serve the CC population nearly as well and vice versa. If the aim of the Governor is effective education, "seamless transfer" may work against that aim. It tends to privilege quick graduation to real learning and skill acquisition. Students in both systems need to be an a curriculum tailored to their specific kinds of needs, and while mass education can never make curricula individuated enough, the more it applies to students with widely divergent needs, the more it may inadequately meet those needs.

If you want student success, you should be thinking about **sound transfer** rather than seamless transfer, and effective, ambitious curricula tailored to the specific needs of student cohorts rather than a common core. There can be common core skills addressed in all curricula, but the delivery may not line up class for class in the differing systems. Focusing on core competencies in all curricula is a good thing, but that may not mean a core curriculum or perfectly equivalent classes. Let's work on how to do the difficult job of giving all our students a really effective education, so when they enter the workforce, they are highly skilled in various literacies and also adept critical thinkers who have become reflective productive citizens.

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